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BikeAlameda Discusses Great Estuary Crossing

Written by COREY HILL Published: FRIDAY, 22 APRIL 2011

The Green Island

Crossing from the West End of Alameda into Oakland on a bicycle is not altogether pleasant. Having navigated through the tunnel a few times myself, sucking down carbon monoxide and praying that I don't crash off the walls of the narrow passage, I can testify that the harrowing trip is enough to convert even a die-hard environmentalist into an automobile enthusiast.

Enter BikeAlameda. For the last few years, this local nonprofit has been at the forefront of the drive to create safe, sustainable alternative for cyclists and pedestrians who want to travel between Alameda and Oakland. I spoke with Lucy Gigli, BikeAlameda's executive director, to find out more about the ongoing drive to create a car-free passage.

I got a little history lesson, to boot. It turns out that for the past 50 years, civic leaders have more or less shrugged their shoulders at the problem. It wasn't until 2006 that officials took action, hiring consultants to conduct a feasibility study for alternative modes of transit. They examined every possibility. "Everything except for swimming," Gigli said.

Following the city's feasibility study, BikeAlameda and other organizations have been working in concert with government officials to turn theory to reality. Gigli outlined for me three working options: building a bicycle bridge, creating a water shuttle service, and organizing van shuttles.

Of the three, the pedestrian bridge seems least likely to materialize anytime soon. A \$60 million price tag puts this plan solidly into the realm of the pie in the sky.

BikeAlameda's current efforts are focused on water shuttles. They've been working since 2006 to implement a pilot water shuttle service from Alameda Landing to Jack London Square. According to Gigli, it is fairly simple to find grants to build a dock or to purchase watercraft. Finding the money to keep the shuttle afloat — that is the obstacle.

In the even more near term, a proposed van-shuttle for bikes from the College of Alameda to Laney College is close to realization. Though the pick up points are local schools, the service will be open to the general public. The set-up is simply, requiring only a van and a trailer. The city has already received the grant, and the key players are working on signing contracts.

"I'm hoping that by May, Bike-To-Work month, everything will be ready to go," Gigli said.

Most importantly, regardless of what option is developed, BikeAlameda has been working with the city to make sure that when the car-free alternatives finally do arrive, they are practical and attractive. If a water shuttle doesn't come frequently enough, people won't use it. If it's not easy to get a bike on and off, people won't use it. "The whole point is getting people out of their cars," Gigli said.

"People can see their job across the estuary, but they have to get into their car to get there. The number one priority for Alameda is fixing this gap."

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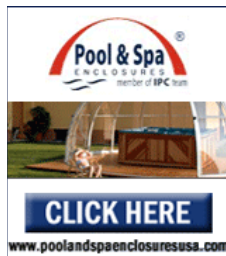
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